

BOARD MEETING

Minutes of Board Meeting held at 5:15 pm 21 January 2009, Little Aynam House, Kendal

Present: Mary Dowling (Chair)
John Short (Vice Chair)
John Stanton
Joan Chadwick
Charles Howarth
Frank Hodson
Robin Brown
Peter Thompson
David Vatcher

Officers: Peter Thomas
Garry Ronson
Sue Boulton
Alison Kinnon

Guests: Brenda Gray

Apologies: Paul Jones
Peter Bland
Peter Woof
Christine Chadwick
David Stubbs

NO	<u>TITLE OF MINUTE</u>	ACTION
	Mary Dowling welcomed everyone to the meeting and wished everyone a Happy New Year.	
705	MINUTES OF LAST MEETING	
	Minute 703 contained a typing error – the format of the payments to be consistent.	
	Subject to this amendment the minutes were accepted as a true record of the proceedings.	
706	MATTERS ARISING	
	The Board noted the Action pro-forma which set out the progress with the action items from the previous meeting and commented on the following:	
	Minute 679: The Board agreed that this issue was now closed (broadband for sheltered housing).	
	Minute 696: John Short updated the Board on the briefing sessions Tenants' Committee had attended held by Graham Martin, Independent Tenant Advisor. The focus of the sessions was thinking about the future options for council housing. In regard to the use of Council owned land,	

John said that Tenants' Committee were thinking in the long term not for short term gain.

ACTION

The Chair agreed that the emphasis was long term planning and stressed the importance of emphasising this point when meeting with SLDC.

707 RESIDENTS' QUESTIONS

No residents' questions had been received.

708 MANAGEMENT FEE 2009/10

The Director of Finance described the background to the agreement of the Management Fee for 2009/10. SLH and SLDC had agreed that the negotiations would commence earlier and as a result there had been a greater opportunity for Tenant Involvement within the discussions. SLH had been looking at a £300k funding gap for the next financial year. However, negotiations had gone well and SLH has successfully secured a Management Fee that would allow SLH a no growth, sustainable budget. The Director of Finance felt comfortable recommending the proposed Management Fee to the Board.

The Director Of Finance included a cautionary note regarding the financial difficulties anticipated for the financial year 2010/11 and assured the Board that the company would continue to seek efficiencies and emphasise the importance of VFM. Robin Brown asked if the Director of Finance was asking the Board to approve the Management Fee and the Budget for next year. The Director of Finance replied that the Board was being asked to approve the Management Fee and the headline budget for the next financial year. The detailed budget would be brought to the next Board meeting for consideration.

GR

The Chair referred to the budget deficit the Company was experiencing this financial year. The Director of Finance explained the steps that were being taken to alleviate this position, budget holders were actively monitoring their budgets and savings were being identified where possible.

The Chair referred to the special meeting that had taken place before Christmas, at which the Chair, the Chair of Tenants' Committee, the Housing Portfolio Holder, the Independent Tenant Advisor and officers from SLH and the Council had been present. The Chair asked the Director of Finance if he felt if the meeting had been of benefit and worth repeating in future years. The Director of Finance agreed that it had been very beneficial.

The Board asked that the Director of Finance present a detailed breakdown of the 2009/10 budget to the next Finance and Procurement meeting with a view to the Board giving final approval at its next meeting.

Robin Brown congratulated the Director of Finance and everyone involved in securing a sufficient Management Fee for the forthcoming financial year.

- RESOLVED:-
1. That the Management Fee, Sheltered and Repairs budget settlements for 2009/10 be approved.
 2. Subject to time for consideration, the detailed 2009/10 budget be presented to the next Board meeting for approval.

709 REPORTS FROM TENANTS' COMMITTEE

John Short referred to the discussions Tenants' Committee had around Leaseholder representation. Tenants' Committee had confirmed that they could nominate a

TC

resident Leaseholder as one of the four Tenant Board Directors.

ACTION

John also updated the Board on the meetings Tenant's Committee had had with the Independent Tenant Advisor. Tenants' Committee had been informed that the Future Options process would take approximately two years to complete and it was imperative that the process start now. Tenant's Committee had suggested that the Independent Tenant Advisor hold briefing sessions for other key stakeholders and this was being arranged.

Charles Howarth concurred with John's opinions.

The Tenants' Committee minutes were noted.

710 CHIEF EXECUTIVE VERBAL REPORT

Councils given freedom to build social homes.

The Chief Executive reported that the government had unveiled plans for a new generation of council –led affordable home building.

Communities and Local Government Review of Housing Finance

The Chief Executive updated the Board on progress with the review of the Housing Subsidy System. There is recognition that the current allowances do not reflect the real need to spend. Early indications are that the government will want to maintain overall control of rents and have a mechanism for dealing with surpluses. Most councils with Almos are initiating an Options Review where there is an anticipated funding gap and are not waiting for the final outcome of the review.

Choice Based Lettings

Consideration was given to developing a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings Scheme and the implications for local allocations policy.

711 OPEN DISCUSSION

Robin Brown asked if SLH would be involved should the council decide to build houses. The Chief Executive confirmed that should the council build new homes, then they would be added to SLH's stock portfolio under management. Brenda Gray said that she imagined that any building and management of new stock would go to SLH.

Peter Thompson asked if the income from any new homes would be kept separate from income from existing stock. The Chief Executive replied that there had been insufficient time to consider the details of the government proposals and that he would report back at a future meeting.

PT

David Vatcher asked if the Council viewed the proposals for council new build with favour. Brenda Gray replied that the Council was keeping an open mind. She referred to SLH's Asset Manager who was advising the Council on how best to use land and assets. The Chief Executive commented on the current arrangements for the disposal of Council owned land on housing estates for affordable housing. SLH had little input into these decisions and there appeared to be a lack of clarity in relation to SLH's responsibilities. Responsibility for the best use of housing assets had been delegated to SLH and there was a need to adhere the overall Asset Management Strategy and plan and work together on these matters.

The Chair commented that it was the Board's view that it should be working co-operatively and strategically with the Council on building new affordable housing.

She emphasised the need for SLH to have a role in the decisions, for example, around the buy back of ex-council homes and the selling off of land on council housing estates for affordable housing. The Chair also referred to the importance of involving tenants in such strategic issues.

ACTION

Brenda Gray replied that she took on board the Board's concerns. However, the Council was dependent on accessing grants in order to facilitate new build and this had to be achieved within a certain timescales.

The Chair reminded Brenda Gray that SLH could move very quickly in responding to issues if required.

John Short commented that the review of HRA finances could be up to two years off completion. The future of SLH will have to be decided before this. If things stay as they are the Company could be facing a shortfall of £12.5m within five years if properties are to be maintained to an appropriate standard. This position was not sustainable. John Short believed that the possibility of LSVT to SLH or something similar had to be considered. He told the board that the Independent Tenant Advisor would be briefing key stakeholders next month on the options available.

The Chair agreed that there needed to be a lot of consideration and debate amongst all stakeholders around this issue very early in the process.

The Chair referred to the meeting held on the 19th December between SLH and SLDC (minutes were circulated to the Board) at which it was said that the Council would produce a paper on this subject for consideration by the Board. This had not been received. The Chair expressed her concern about the very pressing time constraints and the detrimental effect of delays. The Chair asked Brenda Gray if she could progress this with Council colleagues. The Chair, with the support of the Board, asked that the report be made available for the next Board Meeting to be held on the 5th March and prior to the meeting with the Independent Tenant Advisor. Brenda Gray offered to look into progress with regard to the project plan and report back to the Board.

BG

Robin Brown asked if the introduction of a Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL) would negate local occupancy clauses. Alison Kinnon replied that CBL would not override these provisions and that the landlord could tailor the CBL to meet the needs of local people. Joan Chadwick said that mutual exchanges would also still be available.

The Chief Executive's report was noted.

The Chair told the Board that she would like the opportunity to meet with fellow Board Directors to discuss personal development needs. Directors agreed that this was a welcome opportunity. The Chair to contact each Director individually to arrange one to one meetings.

MD

There were no further items for discussion.

712 TENANT SATISFACTION STATUS SURVEY

The Chief Executive presented a report summarising the results of the recent Status Survey. The survey had shown high and improving satisfaction levels. The one area of concern was with how tenants perceived they could influence the service. SLH was actively pursuing innovative methods for involving tenants, such as the TIC Club. Brenda Gray asked how SLH promoted such good results. The Chief Executive explained that SLH published results of surveys in the Tenant's Newsletter. A press release had been issued and the Chair of Tenants' Committee had given an interview to Bay Radio. The Leader of SLDC had congratulated SLH on

the result. The Chief Executive then referred to the survey of Sheltered Housing tenants conducted by Age Concern which showed that 98% of tenants were happy with the area in which they lived and 100% were happy with their Sheltered Housing warden.

ACTION

The Chair asked if there were any suggestions for improving methods of communication. Robin Brown suggested that the Chief Executive email his SLH Newsletter to Councillors, particularly when Councillors needed to make informed decisions around the future of SLH.

PT

The Chair endorsed Robin Brown's suggestion and suggested that SLH raise awareness amongst the Overview and Scrutiny Committee by hosting a briefing session.

PT

David Vatcher asked if tenants were made aware of how they could participate. The Housing Manager confirmed that a summary of the Tenant Compact detailing ways to get involved was included in the Tenant's Handbook.

The Chair concluded that although this was a good news story there was still a lot of work to do around communication with both Tenants and Councillors.

RESOLVED:-

1. That the Board endorse the improvements proposed.
2. A progress report be received in 6 months.
3. The report be referred to the Council for their consideration.

713 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The Director of Finance summarised the accounting position at November 2008. Projections indicate that the Company is facing a £56k deficit for this financial year. The company was taking a prudent approach in trying to minimise the deficit and was looking at various ways of maximising income, for example processing insurance claims.

The Chair asked the Director if the budget deficit was damaging to the Company. The Director of Finance confirmed that carrying a deficit of £56k accounted for more than half the Company's reserves, at a time when the Company was working towards maintaining a balance £100k in reserves. He said that he was reasonably certain that a deficit of £20 - £30k would be manageable and budget holders were actively seeking savings to achieve this aim.

Robin Brown was concerned that a deficit could not be sustained into next year. The Management Fee settlement for the next financial year left no room for an overspend bearing in mind the projections regarding the funding shortfall post Decent Homes.

The Director of Finance acknowledged Robin's concerns and emphasised the importance of maintaining the Company's reserves in order to meet any unexpected calls on the Company's finances. The Director of Finance then updated the Board on the recent acquisition of the company providing SLH's core Housing Management System (ANITE). This has resulted in SLH being notified that Northgate (the new owners) will cease to support ANITE and the Company will have to migrate to Northgate's solution. Early indications are that this will cost in the region of £100k. The Director of Finance is to submit a full report to the Finance and Procurement Committee on this development.

GR

RESOLVED:-

1. That the Board noted the contents of the Report.
2. Senior Management Team to make every effort to minimise the projected budget deficit.
3. Finance and Procurement Committee to keep the situation under close scrutiny.

714 BOARD MEMBERSHIP POLICY

The Business Support Manager presented a report on the draft Board Membership Policy.

The Board suggested the following amendments to the policy:

1. Paragraph 6.3 – Remove
2. Paragraph 8.1, Bullet Point 1 – amend to read “any interested tenant *or resident leaseholders*” shall be invited
3. Paragraph 8.1, Bullet Point 2 - add “Appointment to the Board may not be automatic.
4. Paragraph 13.2 – amend *and hear* to read *and not vote*.
5. Paragraph 14.5 – the Chair to hold office until the previous years accounts are presented and accepted by the Board, the Chair will then stand down. The new Chair to be elected prior to the commencement of the new years business.

RESOLVED:- That the policy subject to the amendments detailed above be submitted to the HR Committee for final consideration prior to presentation to the Board for approval. The effective date of the changes proposed in the Policy would be from the next appropriate AGM.

SAB

715 2009/10 DELIVERY PLAN

The Chief Executive presented the 2009/10 Delivery Plan. Directors asked that the plan be amended to show lead officer names rather than initials.

PT

There were no further comments on the Delivery Plan.

The Chair asked if all the Audit Commission recommendations had been actioned. The Chief Executive confirmed that there was nothing outstanding.

RESOLVED:- That the 2009/10 Delivery Plan be adopted.

716 POLICY REVIEW: ESTATE MANAGEMENT

The Chair congratulated John Stanton on his appointment as Chair of Policy Committee.

The Housing Manager presented the reviewed Estate Management Policy. The Chair asked if Directors had had sufficient time to consider the amendments. John Stanton explained that the review had focussed primarily on linking the policy to corporate strategies. The Chair asked how the policy related to the Health and Well Being Strategy. The Housing Manager explained that physical activity for young people was encouraged by the provision of MUGAs for example.

RESOLVED: The Estate Management Policy be adopted

717 POLICY REVIEW: CORPORATE GAS

The Director of Finance presented the reviewed Corporate Gas Policy. He explained that the purpose of the review was to clarify areas of responsibility.

RESOLVED: The Corporate Gas Policy be adopted.

718 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Robin Brown referred to the impact of SLDC's weak CPA rating affecting SLH's ability to provide services to other organisations. He asked the Housing Portfolio Holder if the Council had any plans to apply for re-assessment. Brenda Gray replied that the Council had undertaken a Peer Review and were currently undergoing a Transformational Change programme. She did not think that this was the right time to undergo reassessment as this process needed to be completed. Brenda agreed to investigate the Council's plan for reassessment and report back to the Board.

BG

719 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 5th March 2009 at Little Aynam House, Kendal

Meeting concluded at 7:50 pm